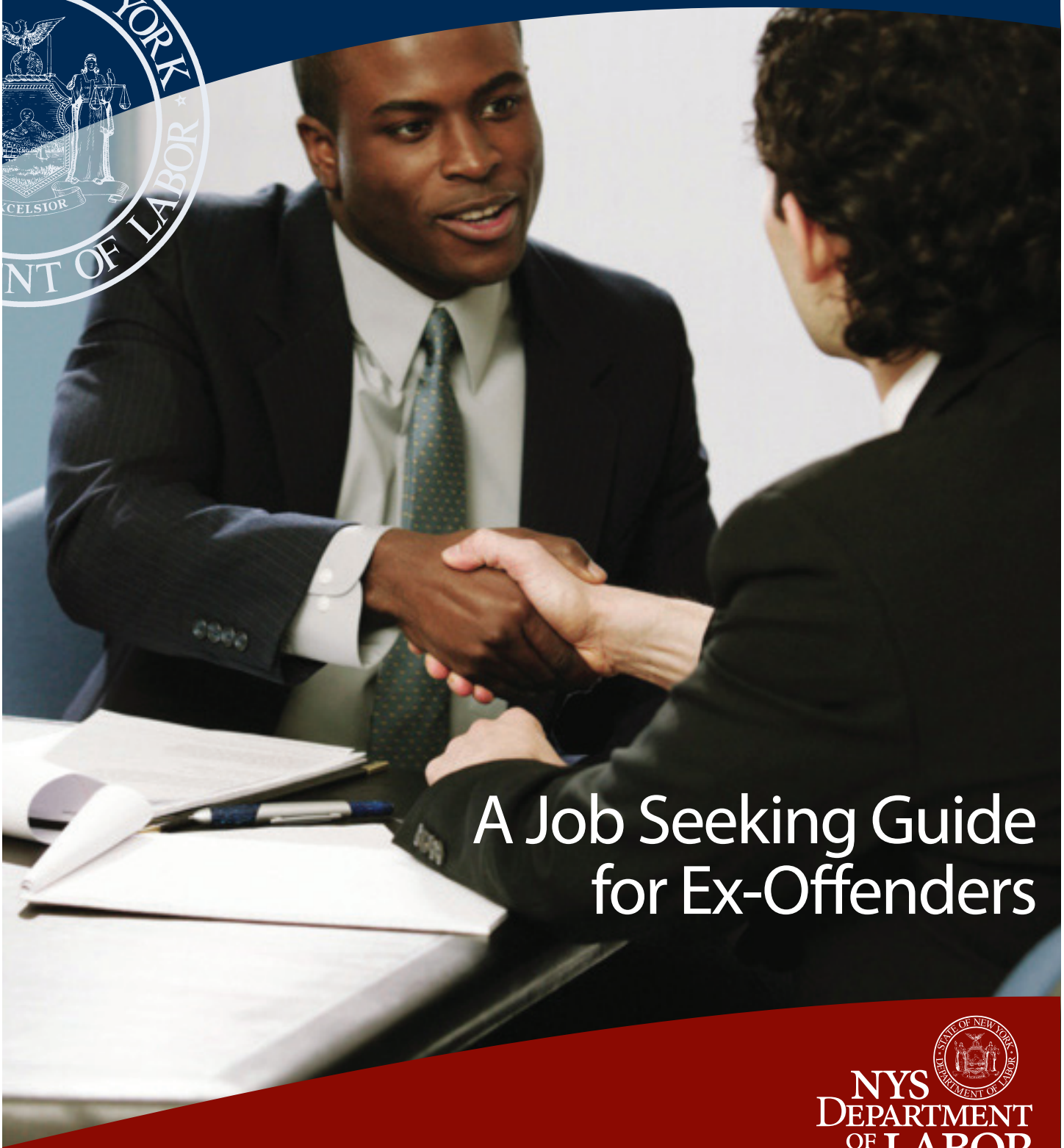
Special Populations Unit

The Prime Objective



A Job Seeking Guide for Ex-Offenders

NYS Department of Labor

PROTECT | ASSIST | CONNECT

The New York State Department of Labor is an Equal Opportunity Employer/Program.
Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

THE PRIME OBJECTIVE *is a resource booklet designed to help make re-entering the workforce as successful as possible for ex-offenders. Although compiled by the New York State Department of Labor, a number of sources need to be credited. Without their valuable input and expertise, this booklet would not exist.*

- The Legal Action Center of New York City
- New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services
- New York State Division of Parole
- New York State Department of Corrections and Community Services
- New York State Department of Veterans Affairs
- New York State Department of Civil Service

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Introduction

THE PRIME OBJECTIVE is a helpful resource for any job seeker who has been convicted of a crime and wants to work in New York State.

Getting a job after being released is known to be a key success factor while on parole or probation. Statistics have shown that most ex-offenders who violated parole or probation were not employed at the time of the violation – it also estimated that about two-thirds of ex-offenders who don't find employment commit another offense within three years.

Finding employment is an extremely important step for all ex-offenders, but there can be some obstacles in your path. **THE PRIME OBJECTIVE** will show you how to deal with many of these issues, as well as steps you can take to help you find a job. This guide will educate you about:

- How to get a copy of your NYS rap sheet (criminal history) and correct any possible errors
- Know your rights – find out what an employer can and can't ask on an application or in person about your arrests and convictions
- How to find out about and remove licensing and hiring restrictions you may have
- How to answer questions on job applications and in interviews about your criminal history
- How to make yourself a more competitive candidate for any job
- And many more useful resources, including contact information for helpful agencies and examples of resumes and cover letters

Using this guide

THE PRIME OBJECTIVE will help you with every point in the process of finding a job, from getting organized before you are released, right through tips to help you succeed once you get the job. The timeline below is shown at the top of each page of the guide, which will let you know when the information on the page will be most useful to you. In the example below, the information given will help you during your ***Job Search***.

At times in the guide, certain additional information is highlighted for your attention, with the text in red which will appear next to an icon as below:

This is an example of information that has been highlighted for your attention.

Before You Are Released

Even if you are incarcerated, there are steps you can take to start planning your job search strategy before you are released.

Since you may not have access to all of the resources you need to get started with your job search, this is a time for personal reflection and planning. You should start to think about the following:

Basic needs first - This step is an important one to think about and take care of right away after being released, even before starting your job search. Think about how you will get access to housing, food, healthcare, transportation, clothing and other basic necessities. You may be lucky enough to have family or friends to stay with on a temporary or permanent basis. However, it is possible that you may need assistance from the community or from government resources. You cannot expect to be successful in finding a job if you don't take care of your basic needs first.

Education and employment - This is something you need to think about, whether you have little to no work experience or you have years of experience in a certain field or industry. Take time to think carefully about what type(s) of work you have done in the past, if any, and what type(s) of work you would like to do in the future. Will you need to get training in order to do this job? Do you need to finish school or your general equivalency degree (GED), or just learn new skills? Both training and finding a new job can take a lot of time, so knowing what steps you will need to take after being released will make this process easier for you.

What steps can I take if I am still in jail or prison?

Take advantage of any vocational training programs available in your facility. Also, if possible, try to create positive relationships with any vocational rehabilitation or training staff where you are so you can contact them for future references.

If you are still in jail or prison, you can get help from pre-release centers, preparation centers and other community organizations available at or through your facility. They can help you get organized, plan your next steps and help you obtain documents you will need for your job search.

How much education do I actually need to get a job?

The amount of education you need will depend on the type of job you want to do. In today's economy, it is very hard to get a good job if you don't at least have a high school diploma or GED.

If you need help getting a GED, call (518) 474-5906 or visit the New York State Education Department's GED information page at http://www.acces.nysed.gov/ged/ after you are released.

After You Are Released

The period of time after being released from incarceration can be both exciting and overwhelming. For many recently released individuals, transitioning back to everyday life can be a challenge – many people don't know where to start.

As mentioned in the previous section, make sure to take care of your basic survival needs first.

Where can I find out about benefits that can help me?

If you are a resident of New York State, you can log on to the MyBenefits website at https://mybenefits.ny.gov. After answering a few basic questions about yourself and your household, you will see a list of programs you may qualify for, such as food stamps, healthcare and housing assistance, as well as information about how to apply.

If you do not have access to the internet, you can contact the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance for help, at:

New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
40 North Pearl Street
Albany, New York 12243
Email: nyspio@otda.ny.gov
Phone: (518) 473-1090

What other resources are available to help me with my post-release transition?

There are many resources available to help with your post-release transition. Excellent websites such as the HIRE Network, www.hirenetwork.org, can give you valuable information to help you find resources for your transition and job search.

Also, don't forget to check with organizations in your community – they are often the best places to go to get the immediate assistance you need. Some places to research in your community may include:

- ***Colleges, universities and vocational schools***: Even if you didn't attend, many schools have placement facilities and/or networks of referrals for other assistance
- ***Public libraries***: The public library in your area may be able to refer you to a number of free services and programs
- ***Churches and faith-based organizations***: Churches and faith-based organizations have been known to help ex-offenders get back on their feet and get the right rehabilitation and employment supports

Searching for Employment – First Steps

What documents do I need before I start my job search?

You should have the following documents before applying for jobs. Many are required in order to accept a job.

- ***Social Security Card***: Contact the nearest Social Security Administration office (listed under US Government Offices in your telephone book), call their toll-free number at 1-800-772-1213, or visit their website for more information, www.ssa.gov
- ***Driver's License/Non-driver ID Card***: Go to the nearest Department of Motor Vehicles office or call the appropriate phone number for your area code; contact information is available in the phone book and on the DMV website, www.dmv.ny.gov
- ***Birth, marriage, divorce or death certificate(s)***: Outside of New York City, contact the Bureau of Vital Statistics in the city where you were born (www.health.ny.gov/vital_records); in New York City, contact the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Office of Vital Records (http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/vr/vrbappl.shtml)
- ***Release papers***: These are given to you upon your release from incarceration
- ***Proof(s) of Education:*** These include copies of your diploma, GED, certificates or transcripts; contact each school individually for help
- ***Military Discharge Papers (for veterans only):***Veterans receive these after being discharged from the military (also referred to as separation papers or DD-214s)
- ***Alien Registration Card (for non-citizens only)***: Contact US Citizenship and Immigration Services; visit http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis or call 1-800-375-5283

What other documents may be useful?

Although they are not required, the following items are very helpful:

- ***Letters of Reference***: Contact previous employers and ask if they can provide you with a letter of reference, or if you can use them as a reference in your job search; you may also have letters of reference provided by staff from schools or vocational training programs you attended
- ***Resumes***: If you have a resume already, this will be helpful as you start your job search
- ***Fact Sheets***: If you don't have a resume, prepare a sheet that lists address and phone numbers of former employers, dates you worked at each job, job titles, etc.
- ***Certificates or Awards***: Include any you have received for completing vocational training or special programs

What are Certificates of Rehabilitation?

If you have a conviction for a felony or misdemeanor, or if you have a JO (Juvenile Offender) adjudication, you can apply for a certificate of rehabilitation. These certificates may help when you are looking for a job or applying for an occupational license.

You do NOT need a certificate if you have a JD (Juvenile Delinquent) or YO (Youthful Offender) adjudication because they are NOT convictions.

Why should I apply for one?

If you have a certificate when you apply for a job or a license, the employer or licensing authority must consider it as evidence of rehabilitation. This means that your conviction cannot be used as the sole reason to deny you employment or refuse to give you a license.

A certificate can usually lift automatic bars to NYS licensing because of a conviction.

Will a certificate completely protect me from being denied a job or license because of my criminal conviction?

No. Even with a certificate, the law allows an employer or licensing authority to refuse to hire or license you if your conviction(s) is job-related.

A certificate is NOT a pardon and does NOT erase your conviction.

You still must list your convictions on a job application if asked about them by an employer. Also, your conviction(s) will remain on your rap sheet (criminal history).

How many types of certificates are there?

There are two types of certificates: the ***Certificate of Relief from Disabilities***, and the ***Certificate of Good Conduct.***

What is the difference between these two certificates?

The major difference is related to the number and type of crime(s) that you committed. The certificate you can apply for is determined by your criminal record.

If you are applying for an occupational license, you will also need to check the type of certificate the licensing agency requires.

Who qualifies for the Certificate of Relief from Disabilities?

You are eligible to apply for this certificate if you have ***one*** felony and/or any number of misdemeanors. This certificate may be issued to you upon release from prison, upon sentencing, or release from jail to community supervision.

While you are still under parole or probation, the certificate is temporary. When you are discharged from parole or probation, the certificate will become permanent unless you receive another conviction.

If you have been convicted of a federal offense, an out-of-state crime, or a crime in another country, you may be eligible to apply for a Certificate of Relief from Disabilities in New York.

Who qualifies for the Certificate of Good Conduct?

You are eligible to apply for the Certificate of Good Conduct if you have been convicted of ***more than one*** felony and/or any number of misdemeanors.

If the most serious conviction you have received is a Class C, D or E felony, the minimum period of time required before you can apply for a Certificate of Good Conduct is three years from the date of your release from prison for your most serious conviction, or three years from the date of your last felony conviction, whichever is most recent.

If the most serious conviction you have received is a Class A or B felony, the minimum period of time before you can apply for a Certificate of Good Conduct is five years from the date of your release from prison for your most serious conviction, or five years from the date of your last felony conviction, whichever is most recent.

How do I apply for one of these certificates?

You can apply for a certificate from the New York State Division of Parole:

New York State Division of Parole
97 Central Avenue
Albany, NY 12206
Phone: (518) 485-8953

The forms to apply can also be downloaded directly at https://www.parole.ny.gov/certrelief.html.

Even if you do get a certificate of rehabilitation, there are certain jobs for which your conviction may automatically disqualify you. Also, to apply for any public office, such as a court officer or firefighter, you will need a Certificate of Good Conduct, no matter how many felony convictions you have. Make sure to research this before you apply for jobs.

Getting and Correcting Your Rap Sheet

What is a rap sheet?

A Record of Arrest and Prosecution (rap) sheet is a record of all of your arrests and convictions. In New York, rap sheets are maintained by the Record Review Unit of the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS).

Who can legally request a copy of a rap sheet from DCJS?

- ***You***: First and most importantly, you have a right to see your own rap sheet
- ***Criminal justice and law enforcement agencies***: This would include:
  - Police departments
  - Courts
  - District and defense attorneys
  - Parole and probation departments, and
  - The Department of Corrections
- ***Certain employers:*** Certain employers are allowed to obtain copies of your rap sheet as part of the hiring process, including:
  - Hospitals
  - Nursing homes
  - Home health agencies
  - Banks
  - Museums
  - Schools
  - Any employer who can legally fingerprint applicants for hiring
- ***Occupational licensing agencies:*** Examples of jobs requiring an occupational license include (but are not limited to):
  - Nurses
  - Security guards
  - Barbers and
  - Taxi drivers

Why is it important for me to see a copy of my rap sheet before applying for jobs?

It is important to see a copy of your rap sheet before looking for work to make sure that there are no errors. Many rap sheets have mistakes on them, including incorrect information, information that should have been sealed and missing court dispositions. This will give you time to correct any possible errors on your rap sheet before you apply for any jobs.

It is also possible that you may not remember every conviction. Seeing a copy of your rap sheet beforehand will allow you to prepare for addressing your criminal history properly in interviews and on job applications.

How do I get a copy of my rap sheet?

If you are not incarcerated or will be incarcerated for less than 45 days, you should contact the DCJS Record Review Unit for an application packet:

DCJS Record Review Unit
New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services
Alfred E. Smith Building
80 South Swan Street
Albany, NY 12210
Phone: (518) 485-7675

After you complete the required form, return it to DCJS with a copy of your fingerprints (see fingerprinting instructions below).

If you are currently incarcerated or have been placed in a juvenile facility for more than 45 days in New York State, you must request a copy of your rap sheet from DCJS. After DCJS gets the request, they will send you a copy free of charge.

Where can I get my fingerprints taken for my rap sheet request?

To get your fingerprints taken for a NYS rap sheet request, contact MorphoTrust USA, the vendor for the state, by calling 1-877-472-6915 or by visiting their website at www.L1enrollment.com.

When you fill out the fingerprinting form, you will need to include this DCJS Record Review ORI Number – NYDCJSPRY. You may have the response sent to your attorney instead of to you. You will need to provide two forms of identification as indicated on the MorphoTrust USA website. You must pay for fingerprinting. However, if you are currently collecting government benefits (such as unemployment or public assistance) or can provide a notarized statement of all of your income, it is possible that the fee may be waived. Contact the DCJS Record Review Unit for information.

How can I correct any errors on my rap sheet?

An excellent resource to help you correct errors on your rap sheet is the Legal Action Center's free publication Your New York State Rap Sheet: A Guide To Getting, Understanding & Correcting Your Criminal Record.

This publication is available via the Legal Action Center website:
http://www.lac.org/doc_library/lac/publications/YourRapSheet.pdf

You can also contact the Legal Action Center at:

Legal Action Center
225 Varick St., 4th Floor
New York, NY 10014
Phone: (212) 243-1313
Fax: (212) 675-0286

If you contact the center by phone, ask for the paralegal on call.

Employer Access to Your Criminal History

Does an employer need my permission to conduct a background check?

No. Certain employers are legally able to get a copy of your criminal record without your permission, which will reveal not only your criminal convictions and arrests, but also your sealed violations. Employers who are not legally able to get a copy of your rap sheet can still use consumer or credit reporting agencies to conduct background checks on job applicants.

Does an employer need my permission to conduct a background check using a consumer or credit reporting agency?

Yes. Both the Federal and New York State Fair Credit Reporting Laws require that an employer gets your permission before running a background check on you using a consumer or credit reporting agency.

Know Your Rights

As an ex-offender in New York State, you have employment rights you should know about before you start applying for and interviewing for jobs.

What are employers allowed to do and ask?

- Employers in New York State are allowed to ask about all misdemeanors and felonies
- Employers who cannot access your rap sheet are allowed to ask for court disposition slips as part of the application process
- Employers have the right to conduct a background check on you through a consumer or credit reporting agency – however, under federal law, you are entitled to a copy of the report and a reasonable amount of time to review it before the employer denies your employment for reasons related to a conviction

What are employers <u>not</u> allowed to do or ask?

- Employers cannot ask about any arrest(s) that did not result in a conviction(s)
- Federal law bans employers from using polygraph (lie detector) tests as a basis for employment
- Employers in New York State are not allowed to discriminate against hiring ex-offenders, unless the felony and/or misdemeanor conviction(s) is related to the type of employment or license being sought (e.g., if you were convicted for fraud and you are seeking work as an accountant, the employer has the right not to hire you on this basis)

If you feel that you have been discriminated against solely on the basis of being an ex-offender, you have the right to ask the employer for a letter stating why you were denied employment. The New York State Division of Human Rights (see contact information at end of guide) enforces the New York State Corrections Law, which states the employer has 30 days to give you this letter.

Hiring Incentives for Employers

There are several hiring incentives available in New York State to help eliminate employment barriers and encourage employers to hire you. In order to be competitive in the job market, you should educate yourself about these incentives and opportunities as fully as possible. These programs can be advertised to employers during the hiring process.

Federal Bonding Program

What is the Federal Bonding Program?

The Federal Bonding Program is a business insurance policy for employers that protects against any loss of money or property due to employee dishonesty. This is a free service offered by the Department of Labor which provides a business with up to $25,000 in insurance if the employer hires an individual from one of the target groups for the program, which includes ex-offenders. It can make the difference in whether or not an employer will decide to hire you.

How do I get bonded?

You can only apply for bonding under the program once you have a job offer with a start date. Once you have a start date with an employer, either you or the employer can contact the local bonding coordinator in your area to get the bonding process started.

What if I don't have a job offer or start date yet?

Whether or not you have a job offer yet, you can still choose to educate yourself about this and other work incentives so that you can tell employers about them in the hiring and interviewing process. They can make a difference in whether or not an employer decides to hire you.

Where can I get more information about the program or get started?

To learn more, visit the Department of Labor's Federal Bonding Program website. To start the bonding process, contact the nearest local bonding coordinator listed at: http://www.labor.ny.gov/businessservices/services/fbp.shtm.

Work Opportunity Tax Credit

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a tax credit for employers who hire individuals from one of the target groups for the program, which includes ex-offenders. Employers can receive a tax credit up to $2,400. Ex-offenders must be hired within one year of their release or conviction to qualify. More information is available on the Department of Labor's WOTC page: http://www.labor.ny.gov/businessservices/edsu/edsu%20wotc.shtm

On-The-Job Training

On-the-Job Training (OJT) provides funding to a business that trains employees at its workplace. To see if you qualify for an OJT position, visit your nearest One-Stop Career Center.

NYS Department of Labor: One-Stop Career Centers

The NYS Department of Labor's One-Stop Career Centers are a major resource as you begin your job search. To get started or for more information, visit http://www.labor.ny.gov/careerservices/CareerServicesIndex.shtm

Services available at One-Stop Career Centers include:

- Career counseling
- Job search assistance
- Local and statewide labor market information
- Workshops on topics such as resume writing and interviewing
- Local and statewide labor market information
- Training opportunities
- Veterans services
- Access to computers, phones and faxes you can use for your job search

Veterans receive priority of service at all One-Stop Career Centers. This means that veterans and eligible spouses are given priority over non-covered persons for employment, training, and placement services. Therefore, a veteran or an eligible spouse receives access to a service earlier in time than a non-covered person, or, if the resource is limited, the veteran or eligible spouse receives access to the service instead of or before the non-covered person.

Other tools available on the Department of Labor's website include:

- ***New York State Job Bank*** – Post your resume and search for jobs: http://ny.jobs
- ***JobZone*** – Use the site's career planning and self-assessment tools for job seekers: www.jobzone.ny.gov
- ***Jobs Express*** – Search for local jobs in your area by job industry: http://jobs.ny.gov
- Listing of ***job fairs*** and ***continuous recruitments*** near you: http://www.labor.ny.gov/careerservices/findajob/jobfairrecruitmentsindex.shtm

For a complete list of all One-Stop Career Centers with contact information, visit: http://www.labor.ny.gov/workforcenypartners/osview.asp

Apprenticeship Program

Another option to consider is to train as an apprentice. Apprenticeship training is a program through which a worker earns a starting apprentice wage while learning a skilled craft or trade on the job, along with additional related learning that usually takes place in a classroom setting.

How does the Apprenticeship Program work?

As an apprentice, you are a full-time, paid employee usually starting at about 40%-50% of the journey-worker wage rate, with increases periodically until training is completed. You will then earn full journey-worker wages. There are also fringe benefits in many programs, like paid vacations, paid holidays, insurance, and retirement plans. The length of training, which is given under the guidance of an experienced journey-worker, varies from one to five years, depending on the trade.

Do I need to be a high school graduate?

For most apprenticeship opportunities, a high school diploma or GED is required before you start.

What kinds of apprenticeship opportunities are available?

Currently, there are over 100 active apprenticeship trades listed with the Department of Labor, including, but not limited to: construction, machining, infrastructure (such as heating and plumbing), and healthcare.

Check the Department of Labor's Apprenticeship Program website at http://www.labor.ny.gov/apprenticeship/general/registration.shtm for more information on how to become an apprentice, and to see current recruitments that are available.

Planning Your Job Search

Finding work after being incarcerated can be challenging, and certain obstacles can make your job search difficult at times. Here are some suggestions to help you plan your time and create an effective job search plan.

Tips to get started

- Begin your search as soon as you are able to do so – do not put it off
- Register with your nearest One-Stop Career Center as soon as possible for help with your job search, resume and cover letter development, and interviewing techniques
- Job hunting is a full-time job – plan to spend 30-40 hours a week looking for work
- Do some research about the best way to contact each possible employer: online application, phone call, in-person meeting, etc.
- If coming in person to contact a business, find out in advance when is the best time and day of the week to apply for a job
- Apply early enough in the day to allow time for employers to respond to your application and to set up interviews, tests or other steps needed for hiring
- Be on time for all appointments

Where Can I Find Jobs?

There are many resources available to help you in your job search.

Networking – It's all about who you know

Networking when looking for work means letting everyone you know you are looking for work and following up with each contact in your network for possible job leads. Since many job vacancies are filled by word-of-mouth or referrals, and many aren't advertised online or in the want ads, building an extensive network can be a powerful resource in your job search.

Make sure to let everyone you know you are looking for new employment. This includes friends, family, neighbors, acquaintances, employment counselors, One-Stop Career Center staff, and anyone else who might be able to help you find job leads. Check in with your contacts often.

Also, don't forget to check out other sources for jobs. Some examples include:

- ***New York State Job Bank*** – https://ny.jobs
- ***Jobs Express*** – https://jobs.ny.gov
- NYS Department of Labor's ***job fairs*** and ***continuous recruitments*** page – http://www.labor.ny.gov/careerservices/findajob/jobfairrecruitmentsindex.shtm
- Other ***online job sites*** and job boards, such as www.monster.com and www.indeed.com
- ***Job placement agencies*** and ***temp agencies*** that don't charge fees
- ***Placement services*** from your previous school(s), union or trade association
- ***Previous employer*** you worked for in the past

Working for the Government

Another source you may want to consider in your job search is the government. New York State is an equal opportunity employer, which means that you cannot be discriminated against for employment opportunities based on your arrest and/or criminal conviction record, unless based on a related occupational restriction.

Although you can apply for government positions, keep in mind that the law may still disqualify you if your conviction(s) is related to the job responsibilities (e.g., persons convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence crimes under Federal or State law are "prohibited from employment in any position requiring the individual to: ship, transport, possess, or receive firearms or ammunition"). If you need help with this, check with the hiring entity first.

To find out more information about getting a job with the State of New York, check out the StateJobsNY website at https://statejobsny.com/public/index.cfm.

For many state jobs, you will need to first take an exam before you can be considered for the position. To see a list of currently scheduled exams, visit the Department of Civil Service's page at http://www.cs.ny.gov/examannouncements/types/oc/. There is usually a fee to register for exams, but this may be waived if you are unemployed or receiving public assistance.

You can also search for jobs with the federal government at www.usajobs.gov.

Be honest about your conviction(s) when applying for government jobs. If you lie on government applications, you can be fired and also face possible misdemeanor charges. Lying on a government application may mean that you will not be eligible to apply for any government jobs in the future.

Filling Out Job Applications

When filling out job applications, it can be difficult to decide what you need to reveal about your criminal history and when to do so. Be sure to read all questions concerning your criminal history carefully. You should only answer what is being asked – you do not need to give any information that is not being requested.

In all cases, you should be familiar with the following information about any of your criminal charges and convictions:

- The disposition (outcome) of the case – did it result in conviction or was it dismissed?
- The date of disposition
- The specific conviction and sentence (if applicable)

Employers in New York State are not allowed to ask about arrests that do not result in convictions. However, they can ask about all felony and misdemeanor convictions and can ask you to provide a certificate of disposition from each applicable court of conviction.

Helpful tips for completing job applications

- Read the job application and follow instructions carefully.
- Write neatly and be complete and accurate in your answers.
- In the work history, you can include any applicable work you did while incarcerated.
- Make sure to write down the name and contact information of the person who accepts your application in your notes and ask them how you should follow up with your application – do this for each employer, and make sure to follow up afterwards.

Have you ever been convicted…?

Some job applications may ask if you have ever been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor. If so, don't leave this question or section blank – doing so could be considered "lying by omission". Some employment experts recommend answering "yes" to having a conviction and then writing "will discuss at interview", which is honest without getting into too much detail.

The Legal Action Center has an excellent resource called *Criminal Records and Employment: Protecting Yourself from Discrimination* which goes over how to answer the "conviction question" on applications and in person. View this resource at:
http://www.lac.org/doc_library/lac/publications/CriminalRecordsAndEmployment.pdf

Do not lie on a job application. A job application is a legal document. Even after you successfully get a job, you can still be fired at any time for having lied on your application.

Preparing Your Resume

You will need to have a resume prepared for almost all types of jobs. A prepared resume is important because it:

- May help you get a job interview
- Reminds interviewers and employers of who you are
- Provides a way for employers to compare your skills and qualifications with other job candidates
- Helps organize all of your employment-related information in one spot
- Can help you focus and prepare for your interview

To get you started in thinking about how to prepare your resume(s) and cover letter(s), some examples with notes have been provided in the appendix of this guide.

If the jobs I am applying for only require me to fill out applications, do I still need a resume?

It is strongly recommended that all job seekers have one. Even if you are applying for jobs that do not require you to submit a resume, there are several reasons you should. It can serve as a quick reference for you to fill out applications – sometimes you can even just copy and paste information from your resume into online job applications. A resume is also a valuable tool to bring to job fairs, recruitments and job interviews. It is also needed to use tools such as the New York State Job Bank and SMART (Skills Matching and Referral Technology).

Do I need to customize my resume for every job opening?

Yes. You should revise a copy of your resume when you apply for each job opening. Take the time to customize your resume to match each job description with your own skills and experience. This extra step of personalizing your resume shows the employer that you are serious about getting the job and you are willing to put forth the extra effort to get the job.

Where can I go to get help with my resume?

There are many places you can get resume assistance.

> ***One-Stop Career Centers***: You can register at your nearest One-Stop Career Center for assistance with writing your resume, to attend resume workshops and to submit your resume for ***SMART***, a job-matching tool that sends job leads based on your skills directly to your email.

The Job Interview

For almost any job an employer considers to hire you, you will be contacted for an interview. The job interview gives a possible employer the strongest impression of who you are, and it can be the most important step on the path to being hired.

Before the interview

- Do your ***research*** – Look up whatever information you can about the business to show interest and initiative at the interview.
- Check your ***appearance*** – First impressions are important, so be sure to look neat and professional and dress for the job as though you are starting the job today.
- Arrive at least a few minutes ***early*** – this shows that you are responsible about being on time and that you respect the interviewer's time.
- ***Practice*** some of the most common interview questions – You can practice with friends, family and One-Stop staff.
- Bring copies of your ***resume*** and any other requested documents.
- ***Prepare yourself*** before the interview to speak about your conviction(s).

Preparing to speak about your conviction(s)

This is a critical step in your interview preparation. At some point in the interview process, you will be asked about or need to discuss your criminal history. Remember: ***You*** have control over how you handle this part of the interview.

- ***Stay positive*** – avoid being negative when discussing your criminal history and do not blame anyone else for your circumstances.
- ***Decide when*** you will discuss your conviction(s) – you want any possible employers to know that you have nothing to hide.
- ***Be prepared*** to deal with any objections or negative reactions to your background and ***show*** that you are a person of value and a strong candidate for the job.
- ***Accept responsibility*** but do not dwell on it. Be brief and truthful, and then move on.
- Focus on what you have done to ***rehabilitate yourself*** and discuss how your ***skills*** will make a positive contribution to the business.

During the interview

- Bring several copies of your ***resume*** and other employment documents (if applicable).
- ***Smile***, shake hands firmly with your interviewer and ***maintain eye contact***.
- Breathe normally, take your time and ***think*** before you answer questions.
- ***Be prepared*** to discuss your conviction(s) in a positive manner.
- Show that you have done your ***research*** about the business and this job by mentioning specific ways you will be an ideal candidate.
- ***Thank*** the interviewer for their time and interest.
- Do not discuss any personal problems or health issues.
- Never criticize former employers or coworkers.

After the interview

Use this helpful checklist to reflect on what went right in the interview, what you want to work on for your next interview and what your follow-up steps will be.

- ☐ Did you arrive on time?
- ☐ Did you introduce yourself to the interviewer?
- ☐ Did you review your resume with the interviewer?
- ☐ Did you smile and maintain eye contact throughout the interview?
- ☐ Did you discuss your interest in the business?
- ☐ Did you handle the discussion about your conviction(s) well?
- ☐ What could you do better next time?
- ☐ Did you send a follow-up letter or email (commonly called a thank-you note) after the interview?

Realize that even if an interview doesn't result in you getting a job, it is still a great opportunity to practice your interview skills. Use this checklist and your notes as a reference point to improve each time you interview.

Is it really necessary to send a follow-up (thank-you letter or email) after the interview?

Yes. A follow-up letter or email message shows the employer that you are serious about your interest in the job and gives the impression that you are the kind of thoughtful and dedicated person who will follow through with tasks and duties on the job if you are hired.

Also, if the interviewer has interviewed multiple people for the same position, a follow-up letter or email message serves as a timely reminder to the interviewer of who you are while the hiring decision is being made. The small, considerate gesture of sending a follow-up message after the interview can make the difference in whether you are chosen for the position, or whether you will be considered for future positions with this business.

You're Hired! How to Keep the Job

If you have succeeded in getting a job, congratulations! Here are some tips to help you continue your success at the new job.

Show up and be on time. This is the #1 piece of advice for keeping a job. Employers rarely have patience for people who are continually late or absent. If you absolutely have to be late or absent, call ahead to let them know (give as much notice as possible).

Be positive. When you are the new employee, sometimes it takes a while to adjust to your coworkers and boss. It's easy to feel alone and become defensive, but don't have an attitude – always be professional and polite. If there is an issue at work with a coworker or your boss, ask to meet with your supervisor or other management staff to discuss your concerns in a professional manner.

Do your job the right way, every time. Do your best to be dependable, responsible and motivated in your new job. It can be tempting to sit and chat with coworkers when your boss is not around, or take an extended break or lunch. Don't do it! Never assume that your actions are going unnoticed.

Communicate effectively. Everyone has different opinions about what is expected at work and how people should communicate in the workplace. If you are not sure if your voice is being heard or if your point is being understood clearly, ask. Use phrases like "Did I explain that well enough?" and "Could you please explain that again?" and "Do you need anything else for this?" to politely and professionally check in with coworkers and supervisors if you think there may be possible confusion.

Notify your parole or probation officer as soon as possible. If you are on parole or probation and your employer doesn't know, contact your parole or probation officer. Verification of employment does not have to jeopardize your job – observation and pay stubs may be able to serve this purpose. Be sure to communicate with your parole or probation officer as soon as you are employed so you can work this out as soon as possible.

Appendix – Resume and Cover Letter Examples

To get you started in thinking about creating your resume(s) and cover letter(s), here are some examples for your consideration. Take note of how information about each job seeker's criminal history is handled and think about how you want to model this information in your resume and cover letter.

Job Seeker #1 – Steve Jones

Steve Jones spent over two years in a correctional facility, where he learned building maintenance and cleaning skills. He has some other work history, but he is looking for a job where he can put these skills to work. Steve wants to include his work experience from his correctional facility, but he is worried that he won't get an interview if he includes this information upfront.
Look at Steve Jones' cover letter and resume to see how he handled it.

Job Seeker #2 – Pam Kelly

Pam Kelly was incarcerated for five years. Before that, she worked for almost ten years in the healthcare field. However, her felony is related to the job she used to do, so her chances are not good for getting her license renewed, or for finding work again in this field. She has applied to get a certificate of rehabilitation to lift bars to licensing and employment. She needs to find other work in the meantime and would consider many different jobs.

See Pam's example application, cover letter and resume for tips on how she addressed her employment challenges.

Job Seeker #3 – Hector Nogales

Hector Nogales has served a long series of sentences, mainly related to drug possession and selling charges. He has several felonies and a few misdemeanors on his record, and not a lot of work history. However, he did receive some vocational training at his last facility and he is interested in applying for an apprenticeship program. Hector also completed mandated rehabilitation and has started to rebuild his network of family, friends and colleagues.

Check out Hector's resume and interview to see how he worked through what could have been possible obstacles to getting a job.

Steve Jones – Example Cover Letter

Steve Jones

123 First Street, Apartment B27A
Plattsburgh, NY 12901
(518) 000-1212
stevejones@gmail.com

December 17, 2012

Mr. Drew McDermott
Building and Grounds Supervisor
North Western University
P.O. Box 289
Lake George, NY 12845

Tip #1 *– In his cover letter, Steve clearly states the position he is applying for without going into where he learned the related skills for the job. Like Steve, you may decide to disclose this information later.*

Dear Mr. McDermott,

This letter of application for the Building Maintenance position is in response to your listing with the New York State Department of Labor's Job Bank.

The combination of my vocational training and over two years experience has provided me with the necessary background for this position.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume for your review. I am looking forward to hearing from you soon to schedule an interview for the Building Maintenance position.

Sincerely,

Steve Jones

Steve Jones

Tip #2 *- At the end of your cover letter, make sure to note any other documents you have included (e.g., resume, application, etc.).*

Enclosure: resume

Steve Jones – Example Resume

***Tip #1** – Include all of your contact information, including your best contact phone number and a professional email address.*

Steve Jones

123 First Street, Apartment B27A
Plattsburgh, NY 12901
(518) 000-1212
stevejones@gmail.com

Objective

Building Maintenance

- Over 2 years building maintenance and cleaning experience
- Capable of maintaining a variety of floors, including wood, cement, tile and carpet
- Able to operate equipment used to maintain outdoor grounds in all types of weather
- Experience working in a fast-paced, multiple-task environment
- Skilled at handling difficult individuals and situations

Related Abilities and Experience

***Tip #2** – Like Steve, you can describe the skills you learned while incarcerated with an emphasis on **what** you can do, not where you learned these skills.*

Floor and Production Area Maintenance

- Swept, mopped, scrubbed and vacuumed building floors
- Cleared production work areas of all scrap materials for recycling
- Cleaned walls, ceilings, windows, equipment and building fixtures
- Applied paint, waxes and sealers to wood and concrete floors

Equipment Maintenance

- Performed preventative and routine maintenance on a variety of equipment and machinery
- Notified management about needed repairs on buildings and equipment
- Managed and replaced defective parts on machines and equipment

Outdoor and Building Maintenance

- Removed snow and ice from parking areas, driveways and sidewalks
- Used snowplow, snow blower, shovel and front end loader to remove snow
- Performed preventative and routine painting, plumbing and electrical repairs
- Mowed lawns and grounds using power mowers, tractors and attachments
- Watered, seeded and covered new grass growth areas
- Applied herbicides, fertilizers and pesticides using spreaders and spray equipment

Work History

Building Maintenance – CCF, Dannemora, New York – April 2010 to July 2012
Teller – Albank Savings Bank, Albany, New York – March 2003 to October 2009

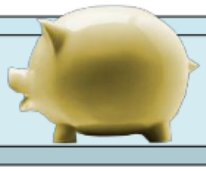
Education and Training

Building Maintenance Training, CCF, Dannemora – January 2010 to March 2010
High School Diploma – Received June 2002

***Tip #3** – In the* Work History *and* Education and Training *sections of your resume, you can use abbreviations (in this example,* CCF *instead of* Clinton Correctional Facility).

Pamela Kelly – Example Application

Trusted Bank Co.



Employment Application

An Equal Opportunity Employer
Company is an equal opportunity employer. This application will not be used for limiting or excluding any applicant from consideration for employment on a basis prohibited by local, state, or federal law. Applicants requiring reasonable accommodation in the application and/or interview process should notify a representative of the organization.

Please fill out all sections completely.

Applicant Information

Name: Pamela Kelly
Address: 124 Maple Lane, Apt. 26B
City: Rochester **State:** NY **Zip:** 14610
Contact Phone #: (585) 333-0101
Email Address: Pamela_Kelly@yahoo.com

How were you referred to Trusted Bank Co.?: NYS Job Bank

Employment Information

Position(s) applying for: Loan Consultant

Are you applying for:

- Temporary work – such as summer or holiday work? [X] Y or [ ] N
- Regular part-time work? [ ] Y or [X] N
- Regular full-time work? [X] Y or [ ] N
- What days and hours are you available for work? Any
- If hired, on what date can you start working? 1/8/2013
- Can you work on the weekends? [X] Y or [ ] N
- Can you work evenings? [X] Y or [ ] N

Salary desired: $ Open to discussion

Personal Information

Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense (felony or misdemeanor)? [X] Y or [ ] N

If so, please explain for each conviction.
Monroe County Court PL 177.10 Disposition Date: 4/2007
Applied for Certificate of Relief from Disabilities 6/2012
Eligible for bonding under Federal Bonding Program

(***Note:*** *No applicant will be denied employment solely on the grounds of conviction of a criminal offense. The date of the offense, the nature of the offense, including any significant details that affect the description of the event, and the surrounding circumstances and the relevance of the offense to the position(s) applied for may, however, be considered.)*

Tip #1 *– When you fill out job applications, type or write as neatly as possible so that it will be easy for an employer to read.*

Tip #2 *– When you fill in your availability and desired salary, be as flexible as you can. You may choose to write that your desired salary is open to discussion, as Pam does here.*

Tip #3 *–Do not lie about or skip the section about your convictions. You do not need to give more information than the employer is requesting - however, you should include information about the court, the penal code related to your conviction and the disposition date. Here, Pam also includes that she has applied for a certificate of rehabilitation and also gives information about hiring incentives for which the employer may be eligible.*

Pamela Kelly – Example Cover Letter

Pamela Kelly

124 Maple Lane, Apt. 26-B
Rochester, NY 14610

Phone: 585-333-0101
Email: Pamela_Kelly@yahoo.com

December 18th, 2012

Ms. Claudia Hughes
Branch Manager – Branch Office #037
Trusted Bank Co.
1 Starlight Way
Rochester, NY 14608

Dear Ms. Hughes,

I am writing with interest to apply for the **Loan Consultant** position at your branch. I submitted an online application last week, and as per our phone conversation yesterday, I am following up by sending in my resume.

As a dedicated service professional with over 10 years of experience in the healthcare field, I have especially strong skills in customer service and building long-term relationships with clients. I am very proficient in math and computational skills, and I was part of a three-person team that restructured the consumer case management system (HealthNYPro) to streamline the intake process for clients at my last job. I am capable of working in demanding, high-stress environments while still performing at my best and providing the best possible customer service.

These are only a few of the many reasons I believe I would be the ideal candidate for this position. I look forward to the opportunity of discussing this with you in person.

Please feel free to contact me if you need anything else. I will contact you in a few days to make sure you received my resume and cover letter, and discuss the possibility of arranging an interview at your convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best Regards,

Pamela L. Kelly

Pamela L. Kelly

Enclosure: Resume

***Tip #1** – Be sure to clearly identify the purpose of your letter, the position you are applying for, and what steps you are taking to get the job.*

***Tip #2** - Describe how you can use your previous experience and skills to succeed in the position – this helps the employer get an idea of how you will be at the job.*

***Tip #3** - Pam ends the letter by stating what she will do to follow up for this job – it shows the employer that she is highly motivated to get the job.*

Pamela Kelly – Example Resume

Pamela Kelly

124 Maple Lane, Apt. 26-B
Rochester, NY 14610

Phone: 585-333-0101
Email: Pamela_Kelly@yahoo.com

***Tip #1** – Notice how Pam organized her resume so that her objective and summary of skills are customized to this position.*

Summary

Loyal, hardworking and dedicated professional with over 10 years of experience in customer service is interested in pursuing new challenges in the banking industry, bringing valuable skills to the position such as:

- Proven ability to build and maintain lasting client relationships
- Superior customer service with three awards of recognition
- Capacity to multi-task and stay focused in a fast, demanding environment
- Excellent organizational skills and ability to learn and adapt skills quickly
- Strong computer skills, including all versions of Windows, all MS Office applications, proprietary databases (e.g., HealthNYPro, QuickHealthNY, etc.), and some programming in Java and HTML
- High-level math proficiency
- Experience with handling money and processing financial transactions

***Tip #2** – Since Pam has listed her related skills in the* Summary *section, she keeps the* Work History *section of her resume short, without listing individual tasks she did at each job.*

Work History

***Tip #3** – Pam's most recent job was a work experience she had at* Monroe County Jail (abbreviated as MCJ) *– by including this on her resume, she avoids having any gaps in her work history.*

MCJ – Rochester, NY	Baker	2007 – 2012
HealthVision – Rochester, NY	Licensed Practical Nurse	2004 – 2007
LiveWellCare – Henrietta, NY	Certified Nursing Assistant	2002 – 2004
LiveWellCare – Henrietta, NY	Medical Biller	1999 – 2002
LiveWellCare – Henrietta, NY	Data Entry Clerk	1997 – 1999

Education

Rochester Health Tech – Rochester, NY	LPN Certificate	2004
	CNA Certificate	2002
MedCode Institute – Rochester, NY	Medical Billing Certificate	1999
Henrietta High School – Henrietta, NY	Regents Diploma	1997

Hector Nogales – Example Resume

Hector Nogales

125 Brookview Apt. #23-C
New York, NY 10111

Phone: (347) 000-0000
Email: HNogales@mail.com

***Tip #1** – Like Hector has done, you can write your resume so that the detailed information most likely to help you get a position is highlighted first.*

Related Skills and Abilities

Mechanical Skills Training *Fishkill, NY* 2007 – 2009

Two year program in mechanical skills, including the following:

- Practice using traditional tools such as hammers, screwdrivers and pliers
- Supervised practice using power tools, such as a power saw
- Drawing, scaling and measuring for practice projects
- Training and compliance in all required safety practices
- Introduction to manual drafting

***Tip #2** – Be sure to include work experiences and education/training you completed while incarcerated.*

Work History

Metal Furniture Manufacturing *The Metal Shop at Fishkill – Fishkill, NY* 2009 – 2012

Preparation and assembly of special metal projects contracted through the Metal Shop, including beds, furniture and security screens

- Instructed in the use of an arc welder and some metal fabrication machines
- Spray painted and finished final products
- Trained on custom products, such as made-to-order enclosures, doors, jambs, snow plow racks, etc.

Food Service Attendant *BHCF – Malone, NY* 2003 – 2006

Cooked and prepared meals for several hundred diners daily

- Prepared ingredients for breakfast and lunch meals
- Served and plated food
- Kept serving area and surrounding areas neat and clean

***Tip #3** – Hector abbreviates* Bare Hill Correctional Facility *as* BHCF *to focus on the skills learned, not the location. He also chooses to list only the city* Fishkill, NY *instead of listing* Fishkill Correctional Facility.

Education

General Equivalency Diploma (GED) BCHF Education Center – Malone, NY 2006

Hector Nogales – Example Interview

Tip #1 – Prepare yourself to answer questions about your conviction(s) in a job interview. Notice here how Hector acknowledges his convictions and how he has shown rehabilitation. Then he explains how his past will not affect his work, what supports he has in place, and how his skills are valuable to the company.

At the Interview

The Scene

Hector applied for a position as a carpenter with a company in Manhattan. He has been called in for an interview. So far, everything is going smoothly. Now, the interviewer is about to ask him about his prior convictions.

Interviewer: Now getting back to your application – you answered "yes" to having a previous conviction and said that you'd prefer to discuss it at the interview.

Hector: Yes, I do have some previous convictions for drug-related offenses, but they will not affect my ability to do this job. I have already been through rehab and have my completion certificate here [*hands copy to interviewer*]. After serving all of my time, I can honestly say that I don't want anything to do with my old life. Now, I'm happy to spend time with my family, my kids and friends who support me.

I'm just looking forward to getting to work and starting a new and better future. As you can see, I have three years of mechanical skills training I can bring to the job, as well as several references you can contact from Fishkill [Correctional Facility].

Interviewer: I appreciate the honesty, but we have had some bad experiences with recovering addicts on the job in the past. How long have you been clean and how do you plan to support your recovery?

Hector: I have been sober for over a year now – my wife, family and friends help me stay focused, and I check in with my rehab counselor twice a month and test once a month.

Tip #2 – You should educate yourself about incentives for employers who hire ex-offenders, such as the Federal Bonding Program and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. Informing the interviewer about these incentives may increase your chances of being hired.

Interviewer: A drug test is required as part of the application process. Are you okay with that?

Hector: Yes, I definitely am.

Interviewer: Well I am impressed with how you've handled yourself in this interview. We do have a few other candidates to interview before we make our final selection.

Hector: Thank you for your time. Before I go, are you familiar with the Federal Bonding Program?

Interviewer: No, what is that?

Hector: It's a free, six-month insurance policy that provides up to $25,000 in insurance to employers. It covers any employee acts of dishonesty from certain employees, including ex-offenders. This is an informational sheet if you are interested in learning more about the program [*hands over sheet*].

Interviewer: I didn't know about it – thank you for the information. We should have a decision to you by next week.

Hector: Great, I look forward to hearing from you – thank you again for your time and consideration.

Resources at a Glance – First Steps

I want to…	*I need to…*
Get a new Social Security Card or correct my current one	Contact the nearest Social Security Administration office (listed under US Government Offices in your telephone book), or call their toll-free number at 1-800-772-1213. Visit www.ssa.gov for more information.
Get a Driver's License or Non-Driver ID Card	Go to the nearest Department of Motor Vehicles office or call the appropriate phone number for your area code (www.dmv.ny.gov).
Get a copy of my birth, marriage or divorce certificate	Outside of New York City, you can contact the Bureau of Vital Statistics in the city where you were born (www.health.ny.gov/vital_records). In New York City, contact the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Office of Vital Records (http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/vr/vrbappl.shtml).
Get an Alien Registration Card	Contact US Citizenship and Immigration Services – visit http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis or call 1-800-375-5283.
Get a Certificate of Relief from Disabilities or Certificate of Good Conduct	Contact the NYS Division of Parole: 97 Central Avenue Albany, NY 12206 (518) 485-8953 Application forms available at: www.parole.ny.gov/certrelief.html
Get a copy of my rap sheet	Contact the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. Record Review Unit, using the information below: DCJS Record Review Unit NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services 80 South Swan Street Albany, NY 12210 Phone: (518) 485-7675
Get my fingerprints taken for my rap sheet request	In New York, contact MorphoTrust USA (formerly known as L-1 Identity Solutions) - a vendor under a state contract - by calling 1-877-472-6915 (toll free number) or by visiting their website at www.L1enrollment.com to schedule an appointment for fingerprinting.
Get help correcting errors on my rap sheet	Contact the Legal Action Center (ask for the paralegal on call): Legal Action Center 225 Varick St., 4th Floor New York, NY 10014 Phone: (212) 243-1313

State Agency Contact Information

NYS Department of Labor

Special Populations Unit

For all questions and information about **THE PRIME OBJECTIVE**, including Department of Labor programs and incentives listed in this guide, please contact the Special Populations Unit:

NYS Department of Labor
Special Populations Unit
SOC, Building 12, Room 425
Albany, NY 12240
Phone: (518) 485-2151
Email: SpecialPopulations@labor.ny.gov

NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Record Review Unit

To request a copy of your rap sheet, contact the NYS DCJS Record Review Unit:

DCJS Record Review Unit
NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services
Alfred E. Smith Building
80 South Swan Street
Albany, NY 12210
Phone: (518) 485-7675

NYS Parole Division

For information about getting certificates of rehabilitation (Certificate of Relief from Disabilities or Certificate of Good Conduct), contact the NYS Division of Parole:

New York State Division of Parole
97 Central Avenue
Albany, NY 12206
Phone: (518) 485-8953

NYS Division of Human Rights

If you feel that you have been discriminated against solely on the basis of being an ex-offender in the process of applying for jobs, contact the NYS Division of Human Rights:

General Phone: 1-888-392-3644

For a listing of all local offices with contact information, visit their website at:
http://www.dhr.ny.gov/contact_us.html

NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

To find out about government benefits that can assist you, including food stamps, healthcare and housing, contact the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance:

NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
40 North Pearl Street
Albany, New York 12243
Email: nyspio@otda.ny.gov
Phone: (518) 473-1090

NYS Education Department

For information about getting a GED, contact the New York State Education Department:

The New York State Education Department
GED Testing Office
P.O. Box 7348
Albany, New York 12224-0348
E-mail: ged@mail.nysed.gov
Phone: (518) 474-5906